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ABSTRACT

Two contrasting predictions regarding the effects of dual- versus single-career marriage on children's sex-role identification were tested: (1) the relative lack of sex-role differentiation in dual-career marriages should promote relatively androgynous sex-role identification in children from such families; and (2) the presence of two "masculine" models in dual-career families should promote relatively masculine identification. Results indicated that both boys and girls in dual-career families were more masculine in their identification than were their counterparts in single-career families. Additional results demonstrated that mothers in the dual-career family tended to be less feminine in their sex-role orientation than in the single-career family; husbands from the two family types did not differ in their orientation. A double standard appeared in the socialization of children from dual-career families. Mothers particularly seemed tolerant of masculine preferences in daughters but intolerant of feminine preferences in sons. Because the findings in this study pertain only to the professional class it is noted that further research is needed to extend the generality of the phenomenon uncovered in this study to other occupational backgrounds and classes. The findings may presage a profound shift in societal values which will become increasingly apparent in the next generation of parents. (Author/DB)

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ABSTRACT

THE DUAL-PROFESSION FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SEX-ROLE PREFERENCES

SUSAN FELDMAN-ROTMAN, Michael Reese Hospital, ROBIN R. VALLACHER, Illinois Institute of Technology, and MYRA LEIFER, University of Chicago

Two contrasting predictions regarding the effects of dual- versus single-career marriage on children's sex-role identification were tested. On one hand, the relative lack of sex-role differentiation in dual-career marriages should promote relatively androgynous sex-role identification in the children from such families; on the other hand, the presence of two "masculine" models in dual-career families should promote relatively masculine identification. In support of the "two masculine models" perspective, both boys and girls in dual-profession families were more masculine in their identification than were their counterparts in single-career families. Additional results demonstrated, moreover, that mothers in the dual-career family did indeed tend to be more androgynous (masculine) in their sex-role orientation than did their single-career counterparts; husbands from the two family types did not differ in their orientation.

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The great influx of women into the labor force over the last two decades has radically changed the profile of the American family. As of 1980, approximately 59 percent of U.S. households consist of two adults supported by two incomes, and over half the working population is comprised of women. In fact, the stereotyped bi-polar division of labor with husband gainfully employed and wife rearing children, is a model which accounts for only 30 percent of American families. But perhaps the most significant employment trend involves the increased participation of working mothers with children under the age six, a phenomenon that can reasonably be expected to have far reaching implications for male-female role relations, but perhaps more importantly, for childrearing practices as well. Indeed, this latter possibility reflects the focus of the present investigation.

This issue has already generated great interest on the part of social scientists. Of special concern to developmental psychologists is the effect of dual-career marriages on the sex-role identification of male and female children. Theorists on the effect of maternal employment (Hartley, 1961; Hoffman, 1974, 1977, 1979; Miller, 1976) have argued that boys and girls in dual-profession families should demonstrate relatively androgynous sex-role orientations (cf. Bem, 1974) as compared to their gender counterparts in single-career families. This prediction is based on the assumption that there is a blurring of sex-roles on the part of parents in dual-career, but not in single-career families, and that this lack of sex-role differentiation reduces the salience of a bi-polar sex-role stereotype in their children.

While this prediction has intuitive appeal, an equally compelling case can be made for just the opposite effect of dual-careerism. Specifically, it can be argued that, compared to non-working mothers, working mothers tend to express characteristics typically associated with the masculine role. If so, this suggests that children in dual-career families are in effect exposed to two "masculine-oriented" models. From this perspective, boys and girls in dual-career families should demonstrate relatively masculine sex-role identification as compared to their counterparts in single-career families. This present study was designed to assess the relative validity of these two predictions.

Both perspectives predict that girls in dual-career families should demonstrate more masculine preferences than should girls in single-career families, since androgyny for a female means the incorporation of masculine characteristics. Only for boys do the predictions differ: the androgyny viewpoint holds that boys from dual-career families should show less masculine sex-role identification than boys from single-career homes, while the masculinity viewpoint holds that boys from single-career families should be less rigidly masculine in their sex-role orientation. Unfortunately, the relevant research to date has focused primarily on girls, so that despite the rather consistent findings -- girls in two-career families are more androgynous than are those in single-career families (Hoffman, 1977, 1979) -- the issue is far from settled. In order to accept the interpretation of greater androgyny in offspring generally, it is essential to establish the case for children of both sexes.

The relevant literature is also marked by two crucial operational shortcomings. First, there has been a failure to assess maternal employment in a rigorous and consistent manner. Hence, conclusions regarding the effect of maternal employment on children's sex-role orientation -- or any other variable for that matter -- must be considered equivocal at this time. Second, standardized instruments to assess children's sex-role attitudes and preferences are not yet available. Rather, most researchers have chosen to develop their own measure -- a reasonable first step, but also confusing when attempting to compare findings from different investigations.

In the present investigation, we attempted to circumvent these difficulties. We first differentiated the sample in terms of professional status and maternal work history in order to provide a comparison between couples in which both husband and wife had been employed since the birth of their children, and couples in which only the husband matched this criterion. Second, both boys and girls from dual-career and single-career families were measured in terms of their sex-role preferences so that a systematic comparison of both sexes could be undertaken. Finally, although no one measuring device has emerged as the standard in this area, one instrument (The "It" Scale for Children) has been extensively employed in past research and was incorporated in the present investigation.

METHOD

Sample

For purposes of this study, dual-career families were those in which both spouses were employed full-time in positions defined as professional (U.S. Census, 1970; cf. Rapoport & Rapoport, 1977). Single-career families, meanwhile, were those in which fathers were professional, but the mother had not been employed since the birth of her children. Families for this study were solicited through an advertisement in an urban newspaper requesting participation in a study of family interaction patterns, and through referrals from those families. This selection procedure generated a sample of fifteen dual-profession and fifteen single-profession families.

The only other demographic difference between the two samples was in mother's education -- women in the dual-profession sample had, on the average, one year of graduate school training, while mother's average educational level in the single-profession family was a B.A. degree. In order to circumvent potentially confounding modeling effects by older siblings, data were collected only from first-born children in each family. Seven boys and eight girls were studied in the dual-profession sample, six boys and nine girls in the single-profession sample.

Instruments

The "It" Scale for Children (Brown, 1956) was employed to assess children's sex-role identification. In this projective test, the child is first presented with a drawing of an ambiguous stick-figure identified only as "It," and is then asked to indicate whether or not "It" would play with each of 36 objects and figures that are presented sequentially, each on a different card. Half of the objects and figures are associated with stereotypically masculine interests (e.g., a toy train), half with stereotypically feminine interests (e.g., a doll). A "yes" response to a masculine object or figure, meanwhile, was scored as 1, 8, 12, depending on the particular item. This instrument has satisfactory test-retest reliability (r=.84). The "It" Scale was administered in each respondent's home by a female graduate student in her mid-twenties.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (1977) was employed to measure husbands' and wives' individual gender role identity. This instrument measures the differential identification of masculine and feminine characteristics (Bem, 1974). The inventory consists of a Masculinity and Femininity Scale, each of which is comprised of twenty personality characteristics selected on the basis of sex-type social desirability. The respondent to the BSRI is instructed to indicate on a seven-point scale how well each of these masculine and feminine personality characteristics describes him or her. The scale ranges from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true). On the basis of his/her score, defined as the difference between the number of masculine and feminine characteristic endorsements assessed by means of a t-test, a sex-role orientation rating is computed. The term androgynous is reserved for those individuals who score high on both masculine and feminine items. Reliability coefficients (internal consistency) of the Bem Sex Role Inventory is .85 and .86 for two college samples and test-retest reliability is .93 (Bem, 1974).

RESULTS

A two-way ANOVA was performed to assess the main and interactive effects of gender (male vs. female) and family type (dual- vs. single-career) on children's sex-role preferences as measured by the "It" Scale. Results demonstrated that boys expressed more masculine preferences (X=71.0) than did girls (X=19.6), $F(1,29)=131.6$, $p<.01$, and that children in dual-profession families expressed more masculine preferences (X=39.78), $F\ (1,26)=4.21$, $p<.05$. Appropriate planned comparisons (cf. Winer, 1962) revealed that, in accordance with past research, girls in dual-profession families expressed more masculine preferences (X=24.0) than did girls in single-profession families (X=15.2), $t\ (16)=2.27$, $p<.05$. Similar findings were obtained for boys -- that is, those in dual-profession families were marginally more masculine in their "It" preferences, $t\ (12)=1.68$, $p<.06$.

Fathers in the two samples did not differ in their sex-role orientation, $t\ (15)=.99$. Husbands in the dual-profession sample tended to be high on the masculine scale (X=2.19) as did those in the single-career sample (X=2.18). On the other hand, wives in the two samples were marginally different in their sex-role orientation, $t\ (15)=1.92$, $p<.06$. The dual-career sample tended to be more androgynous (X=.288) than did the single-career sample.

DISCUSSION

These results clearly are more supportive of the masculinity perspective than of the androgyny perspective, since boys as well as girls in the dual-profession sample made more masculine preferences than did their gender counterparts in the single-career sample. It appears, then, that the social modeling differences between dual- and single-profession families centers on the relatively masculine behavior of both parents in the former family type, rather than on the lack of sex-role differentiation between those parents. It is reasonable to assume that since parents in the two-profession family sample are primarily in male-dominated occupations such as law, medicine, and architecture, they may tend to express more masculine characteristics. This may be a result of personality characteristics which led to self-selection of these occupations or, alternatively, a by-product of professional socialization. Regardless of the source of this phenomenon, it appears that socially "masculine" values are supported in the dual-career family.

Perhaps the most intriguing implication of the present investigation concerns the potential for a double standard in the socialization of children from dual-career families. Quite simply, cross-sex values may be encouraged for girls, but not for boys. Specifically, to the extent that mothers in the dual-career family value masculine characteristics, they may be tolerant of masculine preferences in their daughters and, at the same time, intolerant of parallel cross-sex identification in their sons. Indirect evidence of this contention is provided by VanGelder & Carmichael (1976) who interviewed feminist mothers.

They reported that mothers viewed androgynous identification as liberated in their female offspring, but feared that such an orientation in their sons might reflect homosexual tendencies. Whether this double standard is ultimately adaptive or not remains to be seen. To the extent that a singular masculine orientation is manifest at the expense of a concern for expressive or egalitarian values, there is reason to be concerned about the impact on future generations as they move toward two-career families.

It is important to recognize that these findings pertain only to the professional class. Future research is needed to extend the generality of this phenomenon to families of different classes and occupational backgrounds. It may be fruitful as well to examine personality correlates of the expression of masculinity versus androgyny in working and non-working samples. By way of summary, the findings of the present study are noteworthy in that they may presage a profound shift in societal values that will become increasingly apparent as today's children become tomorrow's parents.

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